# Westminster Abbey

## MONDAY, JULY 6th, 1931.

(in the Octave of the Feast of the Patron Saint, St. Peter, Apostle and Martyr).

**at 8 p.m.**

---

## Festival Service in Commemoration of

# DR. JOHN BLOW

Organist of Westminster Abbey
(1668-1679 and 1695-1708.)

*Sung by the*
WESTMINSTER ABBEY SPECIAL CHOIR,
*with the*
ABBEY CHOIR.

2

# DR. JOHN BLOW.

THE period of the Commonwealth was a very gloomy one in the history of Church music. The zeal of the Puritans broke down the organs, destroyed the music-books, and silenced the choirs all through the land ; the splendid tradition of Church music which had grown up in Tudor and early Stuart times was abruptly broken, and the period which included such great names as those of Tallis, Byrd, and Gibbons was followed by one in which practically all Church music was banned as savouring of Popery.

At the beginning of this unhappy time, in February, 1649, there was born at Newark-on-Trent a boy who was destined to do much to restore Church music to its rightful place.

One of the first acts of Charles II. on his restoration in 1660 was to revive the choral services at the Chapel Royal, and his example was speedily followed at Cathedrals and other places where regular choirs had previously existed. But one great difficulty was that boys could not be found ready trained to take their part in choirs ; and it seems that for the Chapel Royal at any rate boys were drawn from different parts of the country who had musical gifts sufficient to make them efficient choristers at once. Be that as it may, a very remarkable group of choirboys was collected for the newly organized choir, and they were placed under the charge of Captain Henry Cook, who was a good musician besides having distinguished himself in the late wars. One of these first choristers was John Blow, who was brought up to London from his home at Newark in 1660, where he may possibly have received previous instruction from someone connected with the Song School which was attached to the Parish Church of that town.

He seems to have made rapid progress under Captain Cook, the Master of the Children of the Chapel Royal, and Christopher Gibbons, a son of the great Orlando Gibbons, who was organist of Westminster Abbey ; for in 1663 a book called " The Divine Services and Anthems " was published by the Rev. James Clifford, in which appear the words of three anthems composed by " John Blow, one of the Children of His Majesty's Chapel Royal." Two years later we find

him collaborating with his fellow-choristers, Pelham Humphrey and William Turner, in the composition of an anthem, "I will alwaies give thanks," which afterwards became known as "The Club Anthem."

In 1668 Blow was appointed organist of Westminster Abbey at the early age of nineteen. In 1674 he added to this the duties of a Gentleman of the Chapel Royal, and in the same year was appointed "Master of the Children of the Chapel." In October, 1674, he was married at St. Paul's, Covent Garden, to Elizabeth Bradocke, whose father was Clerk of the Cheque of the Chapel Royal, and a Lay-Vicar of Westminster Abbey. In 1677 he received the Lambeth degree of Doctor of Music from the Dean of Canterbury, acting during a vacancy of the See.

In 1679 he resigned his appointment of organist of Westminster Abbey in favour of Henry Purcell. The cause for this step is not known, but there is no reason to suppose that it was anything but a desire to advance his gifted pupil, for on the death of Purcell in 1695 he was reappointed to the post, which he retained to his death. In 1680 he was made one of the organists of the Chapel, holding at the same time the post of organist at St. Margaret's, Westminster. In 1689 he became Almoner and Master of the Boys at St. Paul's Cathedral, and these posts he resigned in 1693 in favour of Jeremiah Clarke, who had also been one of his pupils.

Blow appears to have reached an excellent position as regards worldly goods, and to have been greatly respected and beloved by his contemporaries. He rented a house in the Broad Sanctuary, and possessed a small country estate at Hampton-on-Thames. The fact that he bore arms (which appear on his monument in the Abbey—*arg. a saltire sa., between four torteaux*) shows that he was a person of some social standing. He bequeathed to his children and others a considerable estate in money, houses and lands. He died at Westminster in 1708, and was buried in the North Choir aisle in a grave adjoining that of his pupil, successor, and predecessor, Henry Purcell.* An extract

---

* For most of the above facts in connection with Blow's biography the writer is indebted to a paper by Dr. W. H. Cummings read before the Musical Association, March 16, 1909, and reprinted in the "Proceedings." The dates have, however, been corrected from the Abbey Records.

from the Clerk of Works Burial Book, October 8, 1708, reads : " His feet lieth on ye foundation of ye Corner Piller that is Over Against ye Organ Loft." His wife, two sons, and three daughters are buried in the North Walk of the Cloisters.

Though Blow wrote a considerable amount of secular music, it is on his compositions for the Church that his fame chiefly rests. His music is characterised by great freedom in harmonic progression and real individuality of style. His selection of words for setting to music shows that he was no mere conventionalist, and an examination of his compositions furnishes strong evidence of his love of experiment. These experiments often led him to write passages which sound somewhat crude even to modern ears, and which to many of his contemporaries, and still more to those brought up on the harmless commonplaces of the 18th century, must have sounded as revolutionary as a Stravinsky or a Schönberg does to-day. We find Charles Burney, the historian-critic (1726-1814), abusing him in no measured terms as guilty of " unwarrantable licences—confusion and crudities of counter-point—barbarous harmony—unaccounted millions of faults." He gives copious instances of what he describes as " Dr. Blow's beastialities "*; but it seems that he must have felt some qualms about the bitterness of his indictment, for he adds : " This musician was certainly a man of genius ; and had his ear and taste been refined by a less barbarous age than that in which he lived, would have produced works worthy of a long life. . . . He is always struggling at novelty in modulation and harmony, but often unsuccessfully." Many of the " beastialities " to which Burney takes such strong exception consist of chords (such as that of the " augmented triad " and its inversions) which have now passed into common use. Some of them are obvious misprints ; while others are evidently attempts to give special expression and colour to certain words and ideas. Sir Hubert Parry states his opinion† that these experiments " do Dr. Blow for the most part great credit, for they show that he adventured beyond the range of the mere conventional, and often with the success which betokens genuine musical insight." Dr. Ernest Walker‡

---

* See Brit. Mus. Add. MS. 11,587. † " Oxford History of Music." ‡ " A History of Music in England."

considers him " undoubtedly far the greatest of the Restoration composers after his great pupil. . . . He is by no means free from the mannerisms and weaknesses common in greater or less degree to all his contemporaries, even to Purcell himself ; he is by no means an equal composer, and his harmonic and structural technique is not always that of an assured master ; but the finest of his anthems show him as possessing notable power, expressiveness, and individuality of utterance . . . We cannot, indeed, doubt that he gave Purcell the lead in many directions where the younger man specially distinguished himself. . . . Indeed Blow is really one of the outstanding names of English music. . . . There are things in the best of his sacred compositions which can very fairly stand comparison with any contemporary music of any nationality."

The fact that the great majority of Blow's sacred works still remain in MS. seems to show that his work has always been overshadowed by that of his great contemporary Purcell. He wrote fourteen Services, of which only three or four have been printed, and about a hundred and eighteen Anthems, of which some forty have been printed. The MSS. of the remainder are to be found chiefly in the British Museum, and the Libraries of Christ Church, Oxford, the Fitzwilliam Library, Ely Cathedral and at Tenbury. The majority of his sacred compositions were collected and copied by Mr. W. H. Husk, the Librarian of the Sacred Harmonic Society, and this fine MS. in five volumes is deposited in the British Museum.

The last commemoration service to Dr. John Blow was held in the Abbey in 1922. Since that date several additions have been made to the published compositions of Blow, and therefore the time is ripe for a second commemoration service.

The organ voluntaries are taken from MSS. in the British Museum, and have been edited by the late Mr. John E. West.

The chant for the Psalm is by Blow. Song 24 by O. Gibbons is set to the words of the Office Hymn.

The setting of the Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis is by Blow in the Dorian Mode, edited by Dr. Heathcote Statham. It is contrapuntal in style, and will be sung unaccompanied.

The first Anthem " God is our hope " by Blow is also edited by Dr. Statham. The edition has been prepared from

the Fitzwilliam copies, Blow's autograph and Purcell's copy. It is written for eight voices (S.S.A.A.T.T.B.B.), and will be sung unaccompanied. It begins with a vigorous contrapuntal chorus set to the first verse of the Psalm. A short verse for S.S.A.A.T.B., forms the middle section and provides contrast. The final chorus for eight voices has several interesting themes, which are ingeniously developed. The whole Anthem has breadth and dignity, and is a worthy example of Blow's work.

The second Anthem, "My days are gone" is a short full anthem for four voices (S.A.T.B.). The composer gives an expressive and sympathetic setting of the words, and shews a command of verbal accentuation which is characteristic of his work in common with that of Purcell. The Anthem will be sung unaccompanied.

The third Anthem "O praise the Lord of Heaven" is brighter and stronger in character than the second. It is written for S.A.T.B., and will be sung unaccompanied. Both these Anthems have been edited by Dr. Statham from copies in the library at Tenbury.

The Latin Motet "Salvator mundi" (edited by Dr. R. R. Terry from a MS. at Christ Church, Oxford) is a striking example of Blow's originality and daring harmonic experiments. Had the worthy Dr. Burney been acquainted with this work he could have catalogued many more of Dr. Blow's "crudities," nevertheless it is a wonderful composition, and it is difficult to name any contemporary work which approaches it in "modernity."

The concluding Anthem "O sing unto the Lord" is from the British Museum copy. There are three movements; the first and last choruses in six parts, and a verse for A.T.B. The accompaniment was obviously written for strings, from which an organ part has been arranged.

Song 1, by Gibbons, is the tune set to the words of the hymn sung during the collection.

The two hymn tunes for the Procession are by Croft, the former being the well known "Croft's 136."

It is hoped that these examples of Blow's compositions may do something to quicken a fresh interest in the work of a composer of real genius, who has not, at least in modern times, received the full recognition which is his undoubted due.

*Before the Service the following Organ Solos will be played.*

Verse in C Major - - - - - - *Blow*
Voluntary - - - - - - *Gibbons*
Voluntary for ye single organ - - - *Blow*

# ORDER OF SERVICE.

## Evensong.

(*All kneeling*).

Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy Name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, As it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, As we forgive them that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation ; But deliver us from evil : for thine is the kingdom, The power, and the glory, For ever and ever. Amen.

*Priest.* O Lord, open thou our lips.
*Answer.* And our mouth shall shew forth thy praise.
*Priest.* O God, make speed to save us.
*Answer.* O Lord, make haste to help us.
*Priest.* Glory be to the Father, and to the Son : and to the Holy Ghost ;
*Answer.* As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be : world without end. Amen.
*Priest.* Praise ye the Lord.
*Answer.* The Lord's Name be praised.

Psalm CXXII. "*Laetatus Sum*" Chant in B flat *Blow*

1 I was glad when they said unto me :
We will go into the house of the Lord.
2 Our feet shall stand in thy gates :
O Jerusalem.
3 Jerusalem is built as a city :
that is at unity in itself.
4 For thither the tribes go up, even the tribes of the Lord ;
To testify unto Israel, to give thanks unto the Name of the Lord.
5 For there is the seat of judgment ;
Even the seat of the house of David.
6 O pray for the peace of Jerusalem,
they shall prosper that love thee.

7 Peace be within thy walls ;
and plenteousness within thy palaces.
8 For my brethren and companions' sake ;
I will wish thee prosperity.
9 Yea because of the house of the Lord our God :
I will seek to do thee good.

## First Lesson.

OFFICE HYMN - Song 24. - - - *O. Gibbons*

Lighten the darkness of our life's long night
Through which we blindly stumble to the day.
Shadows mislead us : Father, send thy light
To set our footsteps in the homeward way.

Lighten the darkness when we fail at last,
And, in the midnight lay us down to die ;
We trust to find Thee when the night is past
And daylight breaks across the morning sky.

MAGNIFICAT (in Dorian Mode) - - - - *Blow*

## Second Lesson.

NUNC DIMITTIS (In Dorian Mode) - - - *Blow*

*After the third Collect the following anthems will be sung, during which the congregation will remain seated.*

1 ANTHEM FOR EIGHT VOICES
" God is our hope and strength " *Blow*

God is our hope and strength, a very present help in trouble.
Therefore will we not fear, though the earth be moved,
And though the hills be carried into the midst of the sea.
Though the waters thereof rage and swell,
And though the mountains shake at the tempest of the same.
God is in the midst of her,
Therefore shall she not be removed.
God shall help her,
Therefore shall she not be removed.

2 ANTHEM FOR FOUR VOICES
" My days are gone like a shadow " *Blow*

My days are gone like a shadow,
And I am withered like grass.
But Thou, O Lord, shalt endure for ever,
And thy remembrance throughout all generations.
Arise, O Lord, and have mercy upon Sion,
For it is time that Thou have mercy upon her,
Yea, the time is come. Amen.

3 ANTHEM FOR FOUR VOICES

"O Praise the Lord of Heaven" *Blow*

O Praise the Lord of Heaven,
Praise Him in the height;
Praise Him, all ye angels of His,
Praise Him, all His hosts.
O Praise the Lord of Heaven,
Praise Him, sun and moon,
Praise Him, all ye stars and light,
Praise Him, all ye heavens,
And ye waters that are above the heavens.
O Praise the Lord of Heaven,
Praise Him, praise Him in the height.
Let them praise the name of the Lord.
For He spake the word, and they were made.
He commanded, and they were created.

4 MOTET FOR FIVE VOICES

"Salvator Mundi" - - *Blow*

Salvator mundi, salva nos, Qui per Crucem et
Sanguinem redemisti nos: auxiliare nobis,
Te deprecamur, Deus noster.

*English Version.*

O Saviour of the world, Who by thy Cross and precious Blood hast redeemed us, Save us, and help us, we humbly beseech Thee, O Lord.

5 ANTHEM FOR SIX VOICES

"O Sing unto the Lord" - *Blow*

O Sing unto the Lord a new song,
Sing unto the Lord all the whole earth.
Allelujah.

Sing unto the Lord, and praise His name,
Allelujah.

O Sing unto the Lord, and praise His name.
Be telling of His salvation from day to day.
Declare His honour unto the heathen,

And His wonders unto all people,
For the Lord is great
And cannot worthily be praised.
He is more to be feared than all gods.
Glory and worship are before Him :
Power and honour are in His sanctuary.
Allelujah.

HYMN -- Song 1. - - - - *O. Gibbons*

Eternal Ruler of the ceaseless round
Of circling planets singing on their way ;
Guide of the nations from the night profound
Into the glory of the perfect day ;
Rule in our hearts, that we may ever be
Guided and strengthen'd and upheld by Thee.

We are of Thee, the children of thy love,
The brothers of thy well-beloved Son ;
Descend, O Holy Spirit, like a dove
Into our hearts, that we may be as one ;
As one with Thee, to Whom we ever tend ;
As one with Him, our Brother and our Friend.

We would be one in hatred of all wrong,
One in our love of all things sweet and fair,
One with the joy that breaketh into song,
One with the grief that trembleth into prayer,
One in the power that makes the children free
To follow truth, and thus to follow Thee.

O clothe us with thy heavenly armour, Lord,
Thy trusty shield, thy sword of love divine ;
Our inspiration be thy constant word ;
We ask no victories that are not thine ;
Give or withhold, let pain or pleasure be ;
Enough to know that we are serving Thee.

---

*During the singing of the above hymn a Collection will be made to meet the heavy expenses of this Service.*

# At the Procession.

HYMN *Croft's* **136**

*Full* " Thou art the Christ, O Lord,
The Son of God most high ! "
For ever be adored
That Name in earth and sky,
In which, though mortal strength may fail,
The Saints of God at last prevail !

*Abbey Choir* Oh, surely he was blest
With blessedness unpriced,
Who, taught of God, confess'd
The Godhead in the Christ !
For of Thy Church, Lord, Thou didst own
Thy Saint a true foundation-stone.

*Full* Thrice was he put to shame,
Thrice did the dauntless fall ;
But, oh, that look that came
From out the judgment-hall !
It pierced and broke the spell-bound heart,
And foil'd the tempter's sifting art.

*Abbey Choir* Thrice fallen, thrice restored !
The bitter lesson learnt,
That heart for Thee, O Lord,
With triple ardour burnt.
The cross he took he laid not down
Until he grasp'd the Martyr's crown.

*Full* Oh, bright triumphant faith !
Oh, courage void of fears !
Oh, love most strong in death !
Oh, penitential tears !
By these, Lord, keep us lest we fall,
And make us go where Thou shalt call.

*Station at the entrance of the Choir.*

*V.* Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house
*R.* They will alway be praising Thee.

COLLECT FOR ST. SIMON AND ST. JUDE.

O ALMIGHTY GOD, who hast built thy Church upon the foundation of Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the head corner-stone ; Grant us so to be joined together in unity of spirit by their doctrine, that we may be made an holy temple acceptable unto thee ; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

HYMN *Eatington* *Croft*

*Abbey Choir*
The Church triumphant in thy love,
Their mighty joys we know ;
They sing the Lamb in hymns above,
And we in hymns below.

*Abbey Choir*
Thee in thy glorious realm they praise,
And bow before thy throne ;
We in the Kingdom of thy grace ;
The Kingdoms are but one.

*Full*
The holy to the holiest leads,
From hence our spirits rise,
And he that in thy statutes treads
Shall meet thee in the skies.

COLLECT FOR ST. PETER.

O ALMIGHTY GOD, who by thy Son Jesus Christ didst give to thy Apostle Saint Peter many excellent gifts, and commandest him earnestly to feed thy flock ; Make, we beseech thee, all Bishops and Pastors diligently to preach thy holy Word, and the people obediently to follow the same, that they may receive the crown of everlasting glory ; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

---

# The Blessing.

*The Congregation are requested to remain in their Seats until all the Singers have left the Church.*

ORGAN SOLO Toccata for Double Organ *Blow*

---

*It is hoped that those who are interested in the Special Musical Services will help by becoming Associates of the Special Choir. Full particulars may be obtained on application to :—*

*The Secretary, W.A.S.C.,*
*The Song School,*
*The Cloisters,*
*Westminster Abbey, S.W.1.*